

## Employment Discrimination

**In recent years, discrimination against Middle Eastern Americans in the workplace has increased. The most common forms of discrimination include:**

- National Origin Discrimination: Occurs when an employer fires, or refuses to hire or promote a person because he or she has the physical, cultural, or linguistic characteristics of a national group. However, and employer may legally deny employment if a person's accent has a detrimental effect on job performance.
- Citizenship Status Discrimination: Employers must treat all workers equally whether they are U.S. citizens or not. They must evaluate employees based on their qualifications, not their citizenship status.
- Religious Discrimination: Employers are required by federal law to treat all workers equally, regardless of their religion. Employers must reasonably accommodate the religious practices of an employee or prospective employee, unless to do so would create an undue hardship upon the employer.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- For more information on Employment Discrimination related to Arabs visit <http://www.adc.org/employ.pdf>
- <http://www.enawu.com/> - The Electronic Network for Arab-West Understanding is a developing project that aims to foster relations and dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims and to improve understanding of the contemporary Islamic world in non-Muslim countries.
- <http://www.cair.com> - CAIR (Council on American Islamic Relations) offers diversity and sensitivity training to corporations and government agencies at the local, state and national levels. CAIR's diversity training is designed to help these entities reflect cultural competency in their attitudes, policies, and services.
- <http://www.eeoc.gov> - The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission offers free information materials about the employment discrimination laws they enforce.

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## Diversity Awareness



## Middle Eastern Americans

# Why is Diversity Awareness Important?

- Businesses gain a competitive edge by having a workforce that can communicate with a diversified clientele base
- Decreases complaints and litigation
- Increases company morale, dedication, and productivity
- Improves relations between employers and employees

## Middle Eastern Culture FAQ's

### WHAT RACE ARE MIDDLE EASTERN AMERICANS?

Middle Eastern Americans may have light, olive, or dark skin, and blue or brown eyes. Hair textures vary. The United States has, at different times, classified Arab immigrants as African, Asian, white, European or as belonging to a separate group. Most Arabs identify more closely with nationality than with ethnic group.

### DO MIDDLE EASTERNERS HAVE A SHARED RELIGION?

They belong to many religions, including Islam, Christianity, Druze, Judaism and others. Be sure to distinguish religion from culture. Although Arabs are connected by culture, they have different faiths. Common misperceptions are to think that Arab traditions are Islamic, or that Islam unifies all Arabs.

### IS ARABIC THE ONLY SPOKEN LANGUAGE IN THE MIDDLE EASTERN WORLD?

No. For example, Assyrian and Chaldean services use a dialect of the original Aramaic. Berber and Kurdish are other non-Arabic languages of the Middle East.

### IS THERE ANY ADVICE ON PRONOUNCING MIDDLE EASTERN NAMES?

It can be quite difficult to transliterate Arabic, Hebrew, and Persian words into English. Unless you know the Arabic alphabet, which has many sounds that are not used in English, it's hard to know how to pronounce words correctly. The "r" sound is rolled, and there are characters for three different pronunciations of the "th" sound. If you are unsure, respectfully ask someone to explain. Write down the pronunciation and the spelling, so you can give readers both. Be aware that spellings of the same name may vary.

### WHY DO SOME MIDDLE EASTERN MEN DECLINE TO SHAKE HANDS WITH WOMEN?

For religious reasons, some men avoid physical contact with women other than close relatives. This is not true for all Middle Easterners and exceptions are made to help women who are injured, crossing the street, etc.

### WHY DO SOME MIDDLE EASTERN WOMEN WEAR GARMENTS THAT COVER THEIR HEADS?

This is a religious practice based on the Islamic teachings about modesty. While some say that veiling denigrates women, many women feel that it liberates them. Covering is not universally observed by Muslim women and varies by region and class.

### WHAT IS AN APPROPRIATE WAY TO GREET A MIDDLE EASTERN AMERICAN?

Most Middle Eastern Americans grew up here and do not require special greetings. A smile, a nod and a word of greeting are appropriate in most situations.

Some Muslims feel it is inappropriate for unrelated men and women to shake hands. Wait until the other person extends his or her hand before you extend your own.

### ARE MIDDLE EASTERN AMERICANS A MINORITY GROUP?

This depends on your definition of minority. The U.S. government does not classify Middle Easterners as a minority group, but instead classifies them as 'Caucasian'. Middle Eastern Americans are not defined specifically by race, like some other minority groups, but are united by culture and language. Some Middle Eastern Americans are asking for protection from the same issues affecting people in minority groups, such as profiling, stereotypes and exclusion.

## Religions and Holidays

### ISLAM:

- The most important Muslim observance each year is Ramadan. Muslims also celebrate Eid al-Adha on the last day of the hajj - the pilgrimage to Mecca - and Eid al-Fitr, at the end of Ramadan. Depending on the makeup of your area, these are worthy of consideration as news events. There are other holidays, as well, but do not assume that a holiday or practice observed at one mosque is observed by all.

### JUDAISM:

- The most well known holidays are Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year; Yom Kippur, a day of atonement and reconciliation; and Hanukkah, an eight day holiday commemorating the rededication of the Holy Empire in Jerusalem.

### PERSIAN:

- Norooz is the traditional Iranian new year which begins at the vernal equinox, the first day of spring season. It lasts 13 days, starting with the Charshenbeh Suri (jumping over the bonfire to absorb its reddish healthy strength, while getting rid of one's yellow unhealthy state of being), and ending with Sizdeh Bedar (a day of picnicking, singing and dancing).